



South Central District Health

Keeping your family & community healthy

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HEPATITIS C

WHAT IS HEPATITIS C?

Hepatitis C is a liver infection caused by a virus. It is not the same as hepatitis A (also called “infectious hepatitis”) or hepatitis B (also called “serum hepatitis”).

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Most people do not have symptoms. If a person becomes ill, symptoms may include nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, fever, belly pain, feeling very tired, dark-colored urine, and yellow skin and eyes (jaundice).

WHEN DO SYMPTOMS APPEAR?

Most people do not have symptoms of hepatitis C. If a person becomes ill, symptoms will appear from 2 weeks up to 6 months after the virus enter the body.

HOW IS IT SPREAD?

Hepatitis C is spread by contact with the blood and body fluids of people who have it; e.g., by sharing needles used to inject drugs or through blood transfusion before 1990. There is a low risk that hepatitis C virus can be spread by sexual contact or that a pregnant woman with hepatitis C will pass it to her baby. Hepatitis C is not spread through food, by touching someone who has it, or by coughing or sneezing.

WHAT IS THE CONTAGIOUS PERIOD?

A large percentage of people with hepatitis C will carry the virus in their blood for many months or years. Usually, people are only infectious for a short time; it depends on how active the disease is in their body.

WHO CAN CATCH IT?

Anyone who has contact with blood or body fluids of a person with hepatitis C may be infected.

HOW CAN HEPATITIS C BE PREVENTED?

Do not share needles or drug injection equipment (needles, cotton, water); do not share razors, toothbrushes, or other items that could be contaminated with blood from a person who has hepatitis C.

CAN I GET HEPATITIS C FROM GETTING A TATTOO?

There is some evidence that hepatitis C can be passed through tattooing by reuse of tattooing needles or dye, or by the tattoo artist pricking the back of his or her hand to test the needle’s sharpness. For that reason, it is important to make sure the tattoo artist uses a new needle and dye each time they apply a tattoo. Needles should never be re-used.

IF YOU HAVE HEPATITIS C....

Do not donate blood, blood products, organs, tissue or semen. Use condoms if you have more than one sex partner.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT?

A few people with hepatitis C have serious liver disease and may receive a drug called alpha interferon. However, this drug is very expensive and only works for about half the people who take it and must be taken for a long period of time.

For more information, please contact South Central District Health at 734-5900, ext. 239.